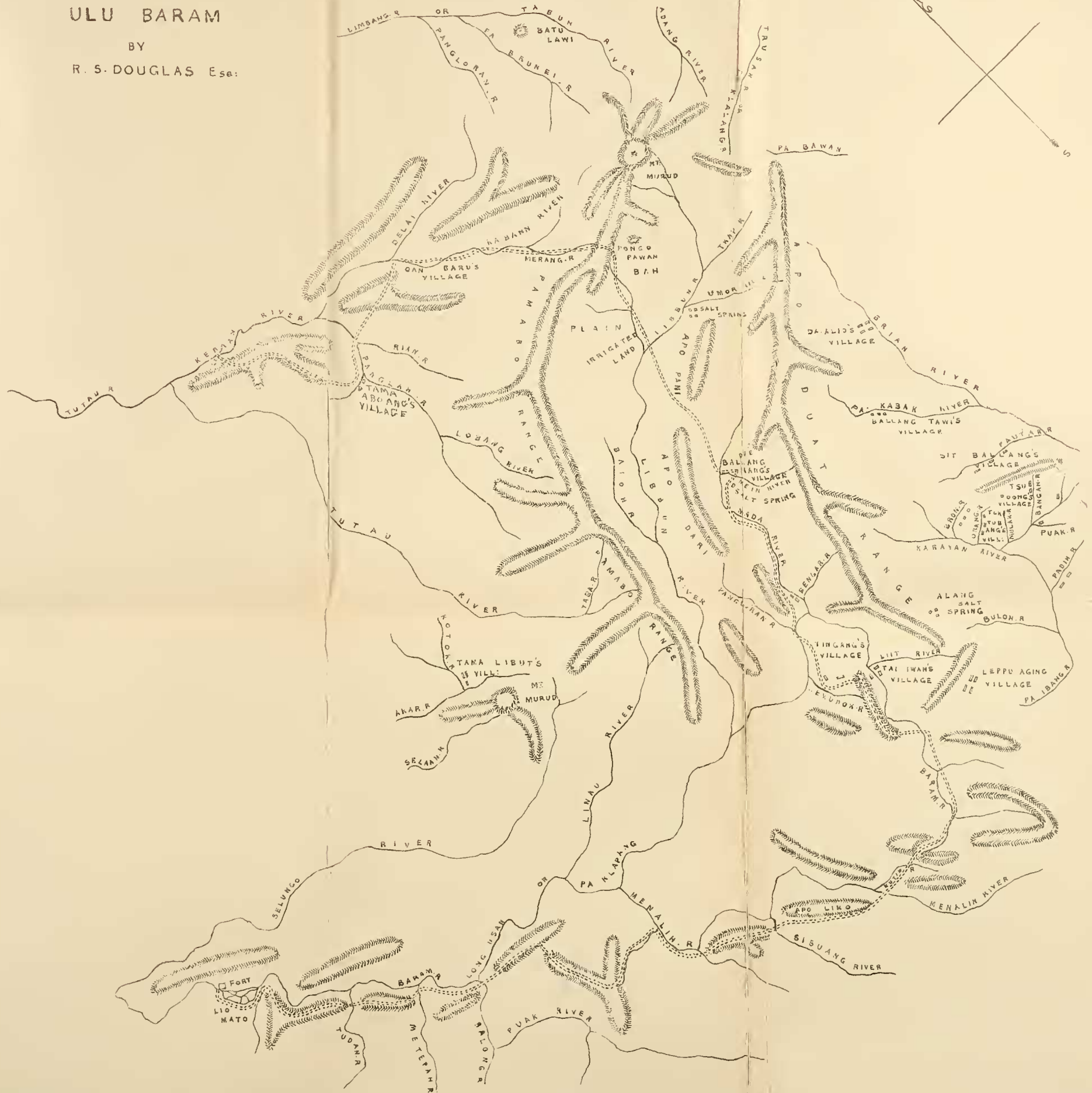


KALABIT COUNTRY

IN
ULU BARAM

BY
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II.—An Expedition to the Bah Country of Central Borneo.—By R. S. DOUGLAS, RESIDENT OF BARAM, SARAWAK.

I suppose that to the great majority of persons, Borneo, with perhaps the exception of New Guinea, is quite the least known country in the world, and the fact that a "Wild Man" came from there and a famous race-horse was named after him, and a vague idea of head-hunters and pirates are the limits of knowledge of the ordinary individual about this island. I remember on one occasion when I was at home on leave, in the course of conversation with a dear old lady, she acquired the information that I was working in Borneo, and remarked, "Oh dear, how interesting! Let me see, that is somewhere in the West Indies, is it not?" It would certainly surprise a great many people in England to know that nearly half of this enormous island is under British protection, the greater part of this being ruled by an Englishman, Sir Charles Brooke, as Rajah of Sarawak, and the remainder is governed partly by the British North Borneo Company and partly by the Sultan of Brunei under direct British control, and that under these different régimes, piracy and head-hunting have practically become things of the past, and instead flourishing towns and villages exist along the coast, and savagery and jungle are giving way to such things as electric light, telephones and telegraphs, railways, and even that latest herald of civilization, the motor-car.

However, far away in the interior, the native still reigns supreme in his pristine state of wildness, and, although a parental Government tries to persuade him to divert his energy into working jungle produce, such as gutta-percha, india-rubber or rattans, every now and then the spirit of the old Adam bursts out and a party of young braves will go dancing over the border and burn down the village of a neighbouring tribe and slaughter as many of the inhabitants as possible. This, of course, means retaliation on the part of the injured tribe, and so a blood feud is at once started and goes on merrily until the Government interferes and due punishment is

inflicted on the breakers of the peace. Fines and pledges are paid up with a sort of resigned expression as if to say: "We have had our fun and so now we must pay for it," and after the rites of peacemaking have been undergone, the whilom enemies are once more friends and may be seen toasting one another in draughts of native beer.

It is one of these expeditions sent out to admonish some tribes who had been breaking the peace that I intend to attempt to describe in the following lines.

The expedition was directed against some tribes of Kalabits, living right in the very centre of Borneo, in a sort of no-man's land on the borders of Sarawak and Dutch territory. These had been raiding and killing Sarawak subjects for some years past and as they had refused to listen to the peaceful arguments of various ambassadors, who had been sent to try and persuade them to allow Government to adjudicate on their grievances, a force was despatched against them a few years ago, which in seven roaring days in the enemies' country destroyed 30 villages and killed some 200 of the offenders. After this sharp lesson they and several adjacent tribes sent down messages saying that they were prepared to make peace, with the result that I received instructions to proceed up country and meet the chiefs of these tribes and arrange peace. As I had to pass some hostile tribes before I could meet with these people, I determined to take a good strong force with me, as with a show of strength and the result of the recent attack still ringing in their ears, I expected that they might consider discretion the best policy and also decide to make peace, in which course I was justified as subsequent events showed.

On October 25th I left the Fort at Claudetown on the Baram River, and accompanied by five policemen and 200 Kayans and Kenyahs under their two chiefs Tama Wan Bayer and Tama Lawai Jau, we proceeded up a tributary called the Tutau. The Kayans and Kenyahs are two large interior tribes, who have lived under Sarawak rule for some years now, and owing to the powerful influence of their chiefs, are quite peaceable and well-behaved. At first our journey was quite uneventful, in fact monotonous, paddling in long war-canoes from day-break to sunset. However, when we had left the Fort some ten days, we got into the rapids and cataracts

for which the Tutau River is famous. The crews of the canoes dropping their paddles, now used long poles to pole the boats up the rapids, and, in the more dangerous ones, when half the people were in the water pushing and heaving and the other half pulling from the rocks, the scene became quite exciting and lively. As usual the Kayans and Kenyahs, who are about the finest boatmen in the world, got the canoes through all right, and after four days poling, pulling and pushing, we safely reached our landing place up a side stream named the Kebaun, from which we had to commence our march inland.

On the first day's march we reached a friendly Kalabit village, Panglah, where we stopped two days to enable us to collect carriers and divide up the loads. Whilst here a curious ceremony was performed. The Kayans and Kenyahs erected a large platform, in the centre of which was a huge trunk of a soft wood tree. One of the oldest Kayan chiefs, a magnificent figure in full war-paint of war-coat and helmet covered with the black and white feathers of the hornbill, then got up and addressing the assembled company informed them of the objects of the expedition and how much depended on the behaviour of the younger men to bring it to a successful and peaceful issue, but, and here his voice grew louder and more vigorous, if in the event of trouble, any one of his people did not fight to his last gasp in defence of the Sarawak flag, he there and then cursed them by all their gods to the nethermost hell. Then drawing his sword and grasping it with both hands, he leapt into the air and, on reaching *terra firma* once more, dealt the tree trunk a furious blow, cutting out a big chunk and repeated this time after time until he was exhausted, every blow being accompanied by the name of some deity, or the manner of some awful death which would happen to him or his followers if they broke faith with the Government or deserted the cause. Then followed a procession of Kayan, Kenyah and Kalabit chiefs, each protesting his loyalty and courage to the accompaniment of resounding blows with his sword on the hapless trunk until eventually it was cut through, when the performance ceased.

We were here joined by some two hundred friendly Kalabits, so our whole force amounted to about 500 strong.

Two days more marching brought us to the foot of the Pamabo Range of mountains, which towered up some 4,000 feet above us. The next day we clambered up these heights and were rewarded by a splendid view from the summit. In front of and below us was stretched out the plain of the Kalabit country. This great plain is bounded on three sides by the great mountain ranges of Pamabo, Murud, and Apo Rewat, which in places run up to 8,000 feet in height, whilst on the fourth side lie the head waters of the Baram River. These mountains are much higher above the plain on their outer face than on the inner, and I should think that this enclosed tableland must be between two and three thousand feet above sea level. It was a magnificent sight, and the contrast of the dark green of the foliage and white limestone of the mountain cliffs, shimmering and glittering under the fierce rays of the tropical sun, was wonderful. In front of us we could see for miles towards the boundaries of Sarawak and British North Borneo territory, and on our right there shot up 7,000 feet into the air, that strange peak, seeming to rise like a needle out of the plain, Batu Lawi, around the base of which one is said to be able to walk in five or six hours.

From here we descended into the plain, which near-by had been thoroughly irrigated and was covered with crops of rice in various stages of ripeness. It is strange that these Kalabits, the wildest and furthest from civilization of all the tribes in Borneo, should be the only interior people to irrigate their fields, and therefore are able to obtain two crops of rice in the year. All the other interior races farm by felling the jungle and burning it and then planting out the grain, which is a most wasteful method and destroys an enormous quantity of valuable timber. In the evening we reached the small village of Ballang Lam Bah, and spent two nights here, as we heard varied reports as to the reception that we were to receive at the hands of the hostile tribes along the Border, so decided to wait until we heard more definite news.

The next day we started off to walk across to the big village of Pun Mein, and took extra precautions, as we expected to be attacked by the numerous tribe living on the Brian River. However, we reached the village at the foothills of the Apo Rewat Range in the afternoon,

and were greeted by the chief, Ballang Maran, after an unmolested march. Here good news awaited us, as Ballang Maran informed us that all the neighbouring tribes had decided to come in and make peace at his instigation, as otherwise they feared that they might suffer the same fate as those tribes who had resisted the Government Expedition already referred to.

Whilst we were discussing the programme as to what we were to do on meeting these tribes, we suddenly heard a mighty shout from the hills above the village. The Kayans and Kenyahs, who were busy building leaf-roofed shelters for the night, immediately dashed for their arms and sent back a yell of defiance and stood prepared for all emergencies. However, Ballang Maran, on sending to inquire, found that it was an embassy from the Pa Kabak tribe under their famous marauding chief, Ballang Tawi, who had come to make peace. The Kayan and Kenyah Chiefs quickly asserted their authority, and when the ambassadors arrived at the house they passed through the encampment and everybody was busy again building huts, but all arms were concealed close at hand in case of treachery.

Ballang Tawi then walked boldly forward through all the friendly Kalabits, who were his deadly enemies and at any other time would have cut his head off without compunction, and shook me warmly by the hand and made the usual polite inquiries as to my health, and when I had arrived. He was a short, well-made man, and seemed very young to have earned on the warpath the terrible name that he has. The preliminaries to the peace ceremony were then gone through, which consisted in a small pig being stabbed with a spear and with this bloody weapon Ballang Tawi touched the breast of each of the friendly Kalabits as they filed past him. This ceremony was then repeated by a Kalabit chief to Ballang Tawi's followers and once more for the benefit of the Kayans and Kenyahs with me. This enabled the various parties to sit down in the same house and discuss the proposition of the peacemaking, which, all the details having been arranged, it was settled to hold on the morrow. Native beer was then produced and the Kayans and Kenyahs exchanged drinks with Ballang Tawi and his people. Great care, however, was

always taken by anybody receiving a drink that the man who offered the drink should first take a sip, so as to show that it was not poisoned, as these interior people are great adepts at removing their enemies in this treacherous manner; the poison being concealed under the finger-nail, and this is casually dipped into the drinking-bowl. None of the Kalabits with me could join in the drinking, as if they did so before the peace-making had been performed, they would render themselves liable to die some most horrible death.

The next morning embassies from the Pa Brian and Pa Utak arrived, so preparations for the peace-making were hurried forward. In the afternoon the different parties began to collect in the spacious verandah of Ballang Maran's house. All the friendly Kalabits to the number of some seven or eight hundred collected at one end of the house, whilst at the other end were about a thousand of the erstwhile foe, and in between, to act as a barrier in case of either party being carried away by their feelings, were seated the Baram Kayans and Kenyahs. The proceedings were opened by Ballang Maran making a speech informing the different parties as to the objects of the meeting and he trusted that the peace-making would be carried through by mutual good feeling and, pointing to the Sarawak flag hanging over his head, hoped that their future life under that flag would be one of prosperity and peace. This was followed by a speech by the Kayan chief, Tama Wan Bayer, who pointed out the benefits of living under the Sarawak Government, that they could go about unarmed in the fields and in the jungle, and sleep peacefully at night, and have no fear of the treacherous foe lurking behind trees and in brushwood, and their customs and religion would be undisturbed, and they would receive justice in their disputes. And for all these benefits the only thing the Government demanded of them was that they should make peace with their neighbours and give up the life of indiscriminate raiding and killing, in which they had hitherto indulged. This was followed by speeches from the chiefs of the hitherto hostile tribes, who said that they were prepared to make peace with one another and give up the custom of going on the warpath, and in case any of them were killed by enemies in the future, they would trust to the

Government to retaliate and obtain satisfaction for them.

A large pig was then produced and laid down in front of the seat where all the chiefs were collected, and one chief after another, taking a firebrand and slightly singing the pig's bristles, with a loud shout of "Oh Bali Boin," meaning "Oh spirit of the pig," asked the pig to show by signs on its liver as to whether this proposed peace was in reality a peace and likely to last, or was it a temporary arrangement and only entered into to pacify the Government, if the latter, then would Bali Boin show who were the people, the Kalabit under Sarawak Government or the stranger Kalabit now within his gates, who were deceiving in this matter. If on the other hand it was a real peace and entered into by the different tribes with intention of keeping, then, if at any future date any of them broke this peace by murder or sudden attack, might the gods blast that tribe, and might they and their women and children die the rottenest and most ignominious of deaths. Having thus cursed one another all round and having pledged one another in flowing bowls of rice beer, the pig was slain and the liver cut out and examined by experts, who said that Bali Boin showed that peace was to be a real and a lasting one, and that it would be no fault of the Government if it was broken. This statement produced a cheer, and after certain blood-money and compensation had been paid over to settle up long-standing feuds between the various tribes, erstwhile foes fell into each others' arms and entered on a drinking bout which lasted until the early hours of the morning. This was interspersed with snatches of song, as a Kayan or Kenyah chief toasted a Kalabit chief to the tune of the magnificent Kayan drinking song, and the Kalabits retaliated in that extraordinary rhythm of theirs: "An do kan, do do kan," the opening lines of which sound like the internal rumblings of a volcano, so deep down goes the singer's voice. The now friendly chief, Ballang Tawi, came up to me at midnight and exclaimed that the omens must have been very good when I started on this expedition, and on my asking the reason why, said, on account of all these hitherto hostile people meeting together and no quarrel or fight having taken place. Hitherto

not only had he been on unfriendly terms with the Baram people, but also with the remainder of the border tribes, and the only occasion on which he had met them before was on the warpath.

The next day he and Tama Lawai, the Kenyah chief, went through the ceremony of "berpirit" or blood-brotherhood. This ceremony consists in each man making a small cut on the upper arm of the other and taking a drop of blood therefrom; this is put into a cigarette and smoked in turn by each, after which a fowl is killed as a sacrifice, and the gods are called upon to witness the fact that the two men are now to be looked upon as brothers, and that if in trouble must help one another, or in starvation share the last grain of rice, etc. After which gifts were exchanged, which consisted on the part of Tama Lawai of a spear, a white coat, and a pair of Chinese trousers. These latter caused much amusement, as Ballang Tawi, not understanding the use of such things, put both his legs into one leg of the trousers and strutted about with the other leg waving in the wind behind him!

The next day we went and visited the neighbouring salt-spring from which the people of this village obtain their salt. After about an hour's walk, we came to a long building, everything of which was made of bamboo from the posts to the tiles. This was the salt factory, and the sight which presented itself to our eyes on entering was fit for a Dante's Inferno. Great long furnaces into which logs of wood twelve feet long were being thrust for fuel and on top of which were placed huge shallow iron cauldrons, and around these flitted and hovered half-naked attendants, whose long hair and wild appearance in the hot smokey atmosphere, all formed a "toute ensemble" absolutely savage and unearthly, and reminded one of the stokehole of a P. & O. liner in the Red Sea. On closer examination we found that the process consisted in baling the brine from the springs near by into the cooking pots; whilst this was boiling the salt coagulated around the brims, from which it was scooped into bamboo vessels. The mouths of these latter when full were then stopped up and the whole thrust again into the furnace and after a few minutes withdrawn, when, the bamboo having been burnt off, the salt appeared hard and white

in a long cylindrical shape. This salt is then exchanged with the neighbouring tribes for weapons, rubber, or paddy, and is also valuable as a cure for goitre on account of its iodide properties.

The springs were comparatively small holes in the ground, but I was informed that they had been flowing since the memory of man and showed no signs of failing. The water on being tasted was very brackish and bitter and reminded one of Epsom Salts. This taste by a curious contradiction of sense is called by the Kalabits "mein" meaning sweet, and the salt is actually given in small pieces to the children to nibble, in the same way that we give a child a lump of sugar to keep it quiet.

From Ballang Maran's house we marched on for a couple of days accompanied by small embassies from the different tribes with whom we had just made peace until we got to the village of Tama Abo Tingang on the Lemudoh River. We had marched all the time down this cultivated plateau and through several small villages, until on the second day we struck the Baram River once more. It was here an insignificant stream of about ten yards wide. The Kayans playfully cut off chips of wood and threw them into the stream, asking them to bear tender messages to their wives and loved ones down-river.

We spent four days at this village and went through the same performance as at Ballang Maran's house with the tribes from the Karayan River, with the exception that it was much more ticklish work, as these were the actual people who had been attacked by the Government. Tingang had got all the chiefs ready to receive me, but at my first appearance they all bolted like rabbits into the house. However, everything passed off successfully. From here onwards at every village up the Baram River we were met by embassies from the neighbouring tribes and luckily no disturbances took place, and my followers began to acquire quite a liking for these peacemakings, as after the strain of the first meeting of hostile parties was over, it meant unlimited rice beer, and pig and buffalo meat galore. The Kayan and Kenyah chiefs kept their men well in hand, and in spite of all these jollifications I never once saw a Kayan or a Kenyah intoxicated.

We proceeded on up the Baram River for two more days, until one could easily jump across it from bank to bank, and then turned inland and marched in a south-westerly direction. By this we saved going all round the large bend the Baram River makes to the north. Here also our large Kalabit escort left us, and we parted with many friendly farewells and cheers.

It was very interesting travelling now, as our route was all through the oldest jungle, absolutely untouched by the hand of man. One day just before crossing the Manaleh River, a tributary of the Baram, a large rhinoceros charged right into the vanguard and unfortunately got away after being stabbed by a Kayan spear. The views we got from the tops of mountains were beautiful. This was much the roughest part of the whole journey and as the Kayans were anxious about being attacked by a powerful Kenyah tribe, the Uma Lims, in Dutch Borneo, they hurried us along at a good pace. On the third day a body of men whom I had sent on ahead to select a place for the night's encampment, came charging back with the news that they had come on the tracks of a large party evidently from over the border. Orders were at once given for the force to close in, and, having put out guards all round, we encamped where we were in the pouring rain. The next morning we proceeded on and came across the tracks which had been reported and counted traces of where about forty men had rested. We pressed on and arrived at Balong River that night, two marches from Lio Mato, where the head of navigation is, and where we were to meet a relieving party under Mr. King, Assistant Resident.

On the way we found further traces of the supposed hostile party, but were reassured by finding remains of such civilized goods as Huntley and Palmer's Cabin biscuits and sardine tins, and also a copy of the "Overland Daily Mail." When we arrived at Lio Mato by a forced march the next night, I found that the supposed hostile party were some Kayans under Mr. King, who was trying to meet me on the road. They had, however, followed up the banks of Baram and so just missed us, but meeting a party of Kalabits turned back and arrived on the next day.

. From here down to the Fort there was nothing special of interest and we enjoyed a luxurious trip down-river, lying on our mattresses in the long Kayan war-boats, whilst we shot rapid after rapid in quick succession, a method of travel which was much appreciated after the long march. We reached the Fort again in five days.

The Kalabits, to which race all the above-mentioned tribes belong, are of Indonesian origin. They are, with the exception perhaps of the Dayaks, the most industrious of the inhabitants of Borneo. All the tribes beyond the Pamabo Range are entirely self-supporting, growing their own rice by irrigation, making their own cloth out of bark, and as I have related making their own salt, which they trade to obtain steel for making their weapons of offence. Until quite recently they had had no experience of the trade goods of civilization, and needless to say few of them had seen a white man before. I was very much struck with the industry of the women, working all day in the paddy fields without any covering whatsoever on their heads. Their dress consists of a small petticoat of bark-cloth, now being replaced by blue cloth, reaching down to the knee, and a loose bark jacket down to the waist. On their heads they wear a sort of helmet of blue and red beads, each as thick as one's thumb; a Kalabit heiress is recognised by the size and weight of her head-gear, as these beads are very old and valuable.

The men's clothing is scantier still, consisting of a loin cloth and a coat made out of deer or bear skin, which also serves as a war-coat in case of attack. The men chiefly employ themselves in felling jungle for hill farming, in the chase, working rubber and, if possible, in taking a head; all the rest of the work in the field and house is done by the women-folk. They are great drunkards, and on the march we passed several large stones standing up by the side of the path, and on inquiry were informed that they were to denote that some chief had had a big "irop" or drunk there. They sit down to a number of jars of rice beer and go on drinking day and night until they are finished. The extraordinary thing is that the race does not deteriorate, as they are fine big strapping men, and the women are very strong. I was very much struck with the

Kalabit big toe. It is very long and sticks out from the foot more after the fashion of a thumb. It must be very useful in clutching hold of roots and projections when climbing the hills.

Their religion is of the slightest. They own to a "Superior Being" and various semideities, and also every object has a spirit of its own, which has to be pacified before anything can be done with it or to it. They unconsciously have one delightful trait. Whenever a big chief dies, his people go to the top of a neighbouring ridge and fell all the trees on it as a door for the soul to fly out, and then celebrate this with a feast and lots of beer. But these clearings give one the chance of getting most wonderful views over the surrounding country, which would be otherwise impossible.

As I have said before they have a name for being treacherous, but I think that this has arisen by force of circumstances, as until recently the number of feuds between the different villages made life impossible unless subterfuges were practised. In some villages I heard matters were in such a state that the men of two neighbouring houses would be at enmity and take the first opportunity of killing one another, whilst the women-folk were quite friendly and intermixed daily; so I expect that this trait will die out with better communications and a lasting peace.

These people live in long houses consisting of anything from four to twenty doors or rooms. The house is divided in half by a wall running the whole length of it. The front half is one long verandah and is used as a general sitting room, whilst the back half is partitioned off into rooms, each room or door being the possession of a separate family. These are generally wretched smoky hovels, and even the Kayans and Kenyahs with me complained of having to live in them. The people are, however, most hospitable, and make very genial hosts, and after the first meeting get over their shyness and become quite friendly. The women were curiously not at all afraid or shy as is the case generally with savage races, but boldly came forward and were soon being chaffed and exchanging the usual pleasant retorts with the

Kayans. I must confess that the Kalabit women will certainly never be renowned for their beauty. I don't think I have ever in my life seen such degraded, sensual faces as they had. Curiously amongst these people it is the women who make the first advances in love and proposals of marriage. May not the possession of this privilege, together with the consequent lack of any necessity for them to attract and charm the opposite sex, be the reason of the disappearance of their beauty and grace? If so, let this be a warning to suffragettes!

The climate up on the Mein plateau was delightful. There was not too much rain apparently, and the temperature was delightfully cool, in fact at night quite cold, so that we all had to sleep near fires and were glad of a thick blanket, whilst in the morning one tested the temperature of the water in the stream with one's toes just like one tries a bath in England on a frosty morning. If only communication was better I am sure the Kalabit country would have a future before it as the health resort of Borneo.

